MAPUPULA

THE ONE WHO TOUCHES

FLORENCE M. BLAXALL

THIS vivid story of the training of an African deaf-blind boy is a commentary upon present experiments in South Africa to meet the needs of the physically handicapped among Native and Coloured people.

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The One who touches

Radcliffe (Mapupula), aged 22, with the author, reading by tactual language.

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By

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Ezenzeleni, S. Africa

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FOREWORD

By the Right Rev. G. H. CLAYTON,
Bishop of Johannesburg.

It is with very great pleasure that I write a Foreword to this little book.

Mr. and Mrs. Blaxall have devoted their lives to the service of Native Africans who are in one way or another handicapped by physical disabilities, and more especially those who are blind or deaf and dumb. They have won the gratitude and respect of all South Africans by the quality of their work. They have always treated every patient as a unity, and their work of healing has been directed to both soul and body. Their praise is in all the Churches.

No one can read this book without realizing the immense patience and the human sympathy with which Mrs. Blaxall approaches her work. If it is true, as a Christian cannot but believe, that Christ came to give to men fulness of life both here and hereafter, then this work which she and her husband are doing must be, in a pre-eminent degree, dear to the heart of God.

But it is work which makes a heavy demand upon those who do it. And I hope that many will read this book, and will be inspired by the reading of it to support

the work which is being done by prayer and money. There is a great need for such work in South Africa, and I for one am very proud to know that it is being done in so admirable a spirit and with so great efficiency by members of the Church in my Diocese.

May Mrs. Blaxall be enabled to help others as she has helped the subject of this little book!

✠ GEOFFREY JOHANNESBURG.

19th July, 1948.

I

A COMING OF AGE

HE stood, a well-built Zulu young man, his head slightly thrown back and a broad smile lighting his sightless face. He was finishing his birthday speech.

"I am Radcliffe, I live at the Men's Hostel. To-day is my birthday. I am 21. Father gave me a new pipe. Thank you."

The blind sat round the walls of the large dining room, both men and women.

The applause showed the warmth of affection in which he was held. As the clapping ceased he sat down, stroking his new pipe and tie. It had been a great day and the dance completed it. With perfect rhythm he danced round the hall with one of his friends, joy radiating from him. Deaf-blind, he was a Person, a happy person.

He was a real part of the blind community at Ezenzeleni, the home of the African blind in the Transvaal. He was a young man taking a young man's place. His twenty-one years had been full of adventure, the great adventure starting from the day of his illness as a very small child, through all the years of his growing freedom from that early imprisonment.

EARLY DAYS

II

HE was born in the heart of Zululand, and must have been between the ages of two and three when one day in his play, he screamed with pain. Rhoda, his mother, hurried to him and put the screaming child into a blanket in the hut, and for days he screamed and tossed. Far from any hospital and doctor, his mother nursed him to the best of her ability. Herbalists came and went, and Rhoda faithfully nursed and prayed. After days the hot body became cool. The tossing and spasms stopped, and with a new terror Rhoda touched his cooling head. Wonderingly she watched. The steady breath of healthy sleep came again from his lips. Perhaps he would open his eyes after this sleep, perhaps he would answer again. He stirred and woke, but the eyes were vacant, and Rhoda's voice calling him stirred no response.

She lifted the shrunken child up. She set him on his feet, but he staggered into her arms. She gathered him on to her back—her son, with now no sight, no hearing and unable to stand. Neighbours saw her leaving her hut with him. She gave her daughter over to their care, told them she was going to the big white

hospital at Durban, "for," said she, "the fever is gone, but it has burnt out my child's eyes and ears." Pityingly they pressed food and money into her hands from their poverty, and Rhoda started for the long journey to Durban.

She reached the great hospital and sat patiently with other mothers until a kindly sister came to her.

The eyes were vacant

"Well mother," she said, "what is it?"

"This my child was sick with a great fever. The fever, Sister, has left him, but it has left him without eyes to see, without ears to hear, and he cannot walk."

Tenderly the sister drew out the story, and a young doctor nearby stopped and listened.

"Can we give him a bed, sister?"

The sister nodded, and the tired Rhoda left her son in great faith and went off, to return daily just to see and to ask.

Radcliffe Bhekinkosi Dhladhla, his full name, stayed some weeks, and gradually learned to walk alone. It was a swaying walk, but quite soon he was able to find his way round the beds—unseeing and unhearing. Then there came a day when the doctor gave Radcliffe back to Rhoda.

"Rhoda, the child will never see or hear again, but his mind is as good as yours and he can now walk. Take him and, as he grows, all that you do let him do. Good-bye," and under his breath, "God bless you."

So Rhoda took Radcliffe and they began a new life. She found work in Durban, sent for her daughter, and wherever Rhoda went the three went together. Gradually as Radcliffe grew, Rhoda gave him little tasks to do. He chopped wood; he washed his clothes; he learnt to defend himself from teasing boys; he made noises—the noises of a deaf child, but Rhoda silenced him because he must not disturb the house in which

she worked. At the age of eleven he had become an encumbrance and it was no longer possible to have him with her at her work. For a time she struggled on with a small grant of money, getting thinner, tireder, but the boy grew.

It was during this time that his name and history was sent to the Blind School for Non-Europeans in the Cape—the Athlone School for the Blind—and to two schools for the deaf; but after some correspondence it was decided that a school for the blind could not take a deaf child and a deaf school could not take a blind child, unless there was a special teacher.

Six months went by and then we, having experience with both deaf and blind, decided that if we were given the opportunity, we would take him and try to educate him. The time came, our work at the Athlone School for the Blind was finished, and work for adult African blind called us, so, as we waited for the next piece of work to develop, we sent for Radcliffe.

III

FIRST STEPS IN EDUCATION

RHODA brought him to us at a mission station in the Cape. It was with some trepidation that I watched the two alight, a tired thin Zulu woman with protruding teeth, clutching a small bundle of blankets, and a swaying boy with his hand placed lightly in the middle of his mother's back. The protruding teeth again showed in the child and, as we watched, the open mouth and swaying figure gave us some misgivings. On they came up the platform out on to the road to the car. I greeted Rhoda and looked at our new protégé. I put his hands on the seat of the car and with a smile he pulled himself in and sat down the right way. His ugly face looked so happy, and like any other normal blind child his busy fingers looked at all that he could reach. His mother would have checked him but I said, "Leave him," and the same attractive smile, a little weary, lit Rhoda's face.

Deaf and blind, and carried where he knew not, he just sat. Were there thoughts going through his mind, and if so, what form did they take? During the following days, wonderingly Rhoda watched her

child attach himself to these strange white people. She stayed, and saw him thread beads, carry wood, laugh and learn to clap in numbers and spell four words on his hands—hat, wood, sweet, paper. Then again trustingly she left her son and went home.

A difficulty showed itself very early. He did not like repetition, and obviously did not see the importance of remembering. In most things a sweet stirred him to make an effort, but he was genuinely bored with any repetition. One morning my husband decided that he must revise the alphabet on his frame, but Radcliffe would do nothing. Presently my husband slapped his hands, and great tears poured down his cheeks, but he wrote the letters. After that he was taught some new ones, and these he did very happily. That stubbornness went on for several years, and we had to find ingenious methods of memorising and repetition.

Quite early we taught him to walk alone. Before, if he was not touching his guide, he walked backwards on his hands and feet, hands first. This method, we learned some years after, was a sign of intelligence and quite a common method of progression for a deaf-blind child. By doing it, you avoid bumping your forehead.

From the beginning he was a source of joy. He was so normal in his mischief, and cleanly in his habits. He stole sweets and ate them; he broke up cigarettes and pocketed them; he changed keys and hid them,

but quite early we noticed that he voluntarily shared his sweets or other gifts of food. The hiding of keys went on for several years, so that we kept keys from him as much as possible. On one occasion the garage keys were lost, and having searched in many places we thought of Radcliffe. I spelt on his hands: "Where is the garage key?" He grinned, and went out to his room, and there it was under his pillow. It was his duty to bolt up the garage doors, and on this occasion he had evidently been left to do it alone, and had also locked up the side door leading to the garage. We told him where to hang that key; so after that he had an added duty which he enjoyed very much.

He walked backwards on his hands and feet

He learned to clean the car, and share in the many little jobs in the house. He enjoyed his walks and games with the students at the mission, and started an easy schooling in the mornings.

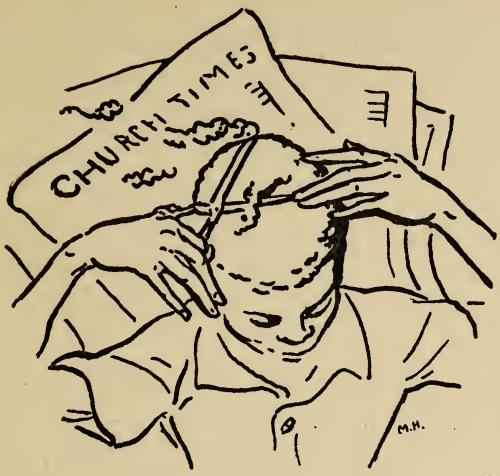
The weekly long walk and scramble over the stepping stones of the river was a never-ending source of excitement, and it was a great day for him when he found out that by jumping on the stepping stones he could splash me! Another day when climbing I put his hands on the tree roots and, at first, somewhat fearfully, but with growing assurance, he pulled himself up the bank, dodging the overhanging branches and landing safely in the field above. From that day he always expected to add a climb to his walk and obviously enjoyed the struggle.

Our party for these walks grew; puppy, Radcliffe and I went regularly and Wendy, a spaniel, joined us. She loved the water and splashed into the stream. On one occasion she touched Radcliffe as she jumped out, and he was very frightened. I helped him catch Wendy, and we put her back into the stream, and Radcliffe felt her swim out. The fright then went out of his face and he smiled, a little tremulously. I slowly coaxed him into the stream away from the stones, but in spite of the rope it was many days before he confidently sat down in the water and spelt WATER. He was happy but was relieved to be pulled out, and dried himself contentedly. He never voluntarily went into the stream, although he did quite voluntarily

climb difficult banks and trees. This led to jumping, and again fear came into his face; but I jumped with him, and after a few weeks he confidently jumped down steps and over ditches, after first putting his hand down to examine what was expected of him.

He was popular with the mission folk, both staff and students, and one day one of the staff undertook to look after him whilst I went out for the day. Her story on my return was amusing. She said that she settled herself on a deck chair with a pile of *Church Times,* and Radcliffe at her feet complete with rug wool, scissors and hook. As she read, occasional pieces of black wool floated across the pages of the *Church Times.* Contentedly she read on, but the wool kept on floating. At last she looked down, and there sat Radcliffe with his head almost completely shaven! The peace was broken, the scissors were removed, but Radcliffe was convulsed with laughter and refused to stop.

Radcliffe, then aged twelve, and I had learnt much about each other during those nine months. The regular Saturday walks were very popular. One Saturday I did not feel like walking and sat in the garden reading. On looking up from my book I saw a sad child, large tears rolling down his face. I put the book down and went over to him and touched him. I spelt on his hand "Do you want to go for a walk?" He stopped crying and looked puzzled. I took his hand, called the puppy, and before we had



Pieces of black wool floated across the pages

gone down the garden path, he was wiping off the tears, boylike, with the back of his hand. His smile had returned. This recognition of different days is still unexplained.

A show of temper another day gave an opportunity for teaching obedience. For some days he resented washing his hands before coming to lessons, so one day when he came in with dirty hands I slapped his hands. He spat at me. I slapped them again: he spat a second time. At last I put him on a stool in the kitchen and left him. Presently the tears came; but still I ignored him and did not give him his usual

morning cup of tea. It was a very puzzled boy who got up later and went for a walk, but he was very quiet.

On another occasion his morning cup of tea led to further discipline. For some weeks I had spelt TEA on his hand and given him his tea. One morning I showed him his tea but refused to give it to him. He sat puzzled and I kept pushing the cup towards him, then removing it. Presently he smiled and spelt by himself TEA. From then onwards he asked for tea and also for sugar.

This lack of spontaneous conversation remained until the year 1946, nine years after he had begun his education. It is probably explained by the fact that his school hours were short and that those around him spoke many different languages. It is also possible that the change of method in his education affected him: six years ago we began to use the tactual language, that is, reading the vibrations of the teacher's face, instead of the manual language, that is, finger spelling. But the failure is more likely to be due to the complete satisfaction of all his needs, for of late failure of his supply of tobacco sends him all over these grounds to ask for a shilling for tobacco.

In order to develop manual dexterity I taught him pattern-making with beads and simple weaving. These handicrafts required the use of both hands, whereas he had previously used one hand and his teeth. This dexterity has continued and now he can make a good basket, besides being able to knit, sew and weave,

crochet and garden. The different stages of his education have been very interesting, he seems to absorb and then stop, then learn and go on again. Often difficulties were overcome by himself. For example, the use of a rug hook seemed impossible, but after five mornings' struggle he pushed my hands away and proceeded to work the hook in his own way quite satisfactorily. Since then he has made several really good mats, three lying in front of altars in African churches. By arranging different coloured wools in different baskets he makes quite good designs. This same independence of method showed itself in learning braille, as it was impossible to teach him as a blind child is taught, namely by learning the number of the dots, but after a time he grasped the principle that to read braille he had to reverse the process of writing it.

From the beginning his happy nature was against rapid educational progress. He saw no necessity for remembering. Things that he liked to do he did with joy, other things he made no effort about. He quite early discarded bead-threading, but smiled when struggling with a basket or pulling out a tough tree root in the garden. It had been decided from the beginning to aim at making contacts as fast as possible, so we chose the manual alphabet of the deaf and dumb-finger-spelling.

Our stay at St. Matthew's Mission was very interesting. I was able to give all my time to him, as my husband went to the Transvaal to start the much over-

due adult work for Native and Coloured people. Up to that time no work was being done for adult non-Europeans in the Transvaal, so that there was no after-care in that Province for children educated at the Athlone Blind School, Cape. Thus whilst Radcliffe, the first African blind deaf-mute was beginning education, the seeds were being sown for Ezenzeleni, Transvaal, the present centre for adult non-European blind work, to which Radcliffe came later on.

It was a great day when he found out that
he could splash me

IV

TRIP TO JOHANNESBURG

THIS stay at the mission station in the Cape Province ended in December, 1937, and the warmth of affection that he had won is shown by the fact that even now in 1946 people still ask for the little deaf-blind boy! His journey to Johannesburg, a distance of over 500 miles, gave him immense joy. There he sat in our old Dodge car clutching special possessions of his own, surrounded by luggage that he had helped to pack and fit into the car. A student going home to Johannesburg joined us, and the stopping at hotels for meals and for one night's rest all added interest to the excited child.

A break for one night was made at one town and Radcliffe and his companion shared the car for the night, there being no proper accommodation for Africans in the hotel. His amusement at going to sleep on the seat of the car can never be forgotten. His whole being radiated amusement at such an unusual sleeping place. He awakened early and inquisitively went round everything in the car. He was obviously anxious to get off again and excitedly re-packed. He

sat with an air of complete content when he was allowed to help start the engine, and to feel the car once again driving off seemed the crown of his enjoyment.

It is impossible in this short story to describe the beauty of the country going from the Cape into the Free State; mountain passes and wide stretches of plain were a joy. In the Free State we stopped at Bloemfontein and received amazing kindness from the Sisters at St. Michael's School. Radcliffe quickly won their hearts, and I had to tell and re-tell the story of his freedom from silence and darkness. With promise of prayers and surrounded by much love we started on the last stage to Johannesburg. Vereeniging, a growing industrial town, was reached in the early evening, and in spite of the coming storm we pushed on. Now the flatness of the Free State was left, and the greenness and the rising ground of the Transvaal brought new beauties. Just before dark I saw for the first time the growing dumps standing up stark white against the blackening sky, the outward sign of the struggle for gold and all that it involves. We pressed on into Johannesburg itself, passing between its skyscrapers and then out again on the Reef road through the mine country. The storm raged on.

To add to the difficulties the car lights fused and repeated repairs of the fuse with silver paper delayed progress. The student was not very sure of the way and both Radcliffe and I were tired. The journey up

Radcliffe mustered up a smile when
he felt the touch

the last street, Gerty Street, Sophiatown, was an adventure. It was a rough road with a big ditch in the middle, down which poured torrents of water. The house we sought was at the top of the street and our arrival was accompanied by continuous claps of thunder. Radcliffe now was too tired to be interested, but mustered up a weary smile when he felt the touch of Father and replied on his hands, "Good-night, Father." After a meal, he was soon fast asleep.

V

LIFE IN SOPHIATOWN

SOPHIATOWN is a large overcrowded African township on the western side of Johannesburg. Originally it was a farm about five miles from the then centre of Johannesburg. Many of the houses are owned by Africans, unlike the large municipal townships. At the time of our arrival there was only one tarred road, very little light and no sewerage for forty thousand people. It is now well lit, has an ample water supply and a sewage system. Much had been done by enthusiastic missions, and the Anglican Mission, Ekutuleni, with its schools and club centre, has given great help to the struggling population.

The blind Africans and the staff at this new workshop made friends with Radcliffe, but for the first time he was tearful and this tearfulness continued during those weeks in Sophiatown. The cook, a strong Xosa woman, was amazed at what a baby he was, and it was impossible to defend him then. Whether it was the noise and the smells, or whether he missed his friends at St. Matthew's, it is impossible to say, but his ready smile and courage did not come back until

we moved into a house with a garden, and he adopted the house boy Amos. Amos and he became fast friends and, with Amos, Radcliffe was content to help in the household chores and go for the weekly shopping to the market. Here we were able to go on with his education, and his vocabulary grew, though with no attempt to use it. He was still very definite in his likes and dislikes of handwork and preferred doing things that Amos did. I returned to our efforts to produce sound, but he remained silent, just hissing in his laughter. He grew in character, and an incident at this time tells a great deal about him.

The house boy had a bout of fever, and Radcliffe was seen to come into the kitchen one day and get a cup of water. He took the cup across the yard, and when the house boy got up this was the story he told.

Radcliffe, said Amos, had found him in bed and, quite on his own, had gone out and got water for him. Amos was very moved, but the wonderful thing is how Radcliffe came to know that Amos was sick and that he would like water. A kind act, completely untaught.

Going to the market was a great joy. Newtown Market, the big shopping centre of the city, was full of interest to the deaf-blind boy. Lots of smells, lots of movement, and friendly hands that thrust bananas, oranges and sixpences into his hand. Happily he held the large baskets and helped to fill them with the vegetables. He made another friend, Simon, who took him behind the counters, and let him move the heavily

packed sacks. Sweating, but happy, he helped Simon pack the car, and won many smiles by his obvious enjoyment of what he was doing. No one resented his restless fingers touching as he stood at the stores. The cold of the fish puzzled him, and he touched again and again and laughed. Moving fowls in crates excited him, and his face registered his curiosity, and one day the shunting of the goods train quite close to him urged him to strain and stretch to touch.

Going to the big Church of Christ the King, standing up above Sophiatown, was an even greater joy. He quickly learned the order of the service and stood and sat and kneeled without prompting. He always had his penny ready for the collection bag, but one Sunday he pulled out a shilling. He felt the milled edges, smiled, and put it back into his purse, took out the penny and put it into the bag with an air of complete satisfaction.

One Palm Sunday, 1941, we took a van full of our blind folk to the Church of Christ the King, Radcliffe being in the van. The street and the church grounds were full of people passing into the great church. With true African courtesy they drew aside as the blind made their way in, and many followed Radcliffe with eyes showing their affection. The church filled and the great volume of African voices burst out. From their seats the congregation went in orderly procession up to the altar steps, and with them went the blind, a kindly guide leading them. Walking with his head

Radcliffe touched the Crucifix

slightly thrown back Radcliffe went with them, and knelt with them. Into his hand the palm cross was put, and a radiant child came back to his seat and pressed the cross in my hand. I gave it back to him, and he put it in his buttonhole and pressed my hand there to see if I approved. We would have given much to know his thoughts that day.

The following year we went again, and again

Radcliffe joined the procession. Unprompted he knelt on the steps, unprompted he stretched out his two hands for the cross and, radiant again, he put it in his buttonhole and came back to his seat. That cross was tied up in his own very private possessions for a long time, and he spelt and signed its name. Often we went across to the Institute Chapel and Radcliffe touched the crucifix and spelt and signed the Cross, and learned the deaf sign for Jesus, the point of the nails in his hands. What can it mean to him? What, too, can the spelt Amen mean to him at the end of the prayers. Away in the distance the priest's voice stops, but a deaf-blind boy spells Amen. What is going on in his mind?

VI

A GREAT CHANGE

IN 1937 a great change came into Radcliffe's life. Three visitors came from America: Tad Chapman —an educated deaf-blind young man—his mother, Mrs. Chapman, and Miss Hall, his teacher. This young man had been educated at Perkins Institute for the Blind, and was a thoroughly interesting personality. He was able to talk about anything, putting his hands on one's face to feel what was being said. The visit was organized to interest the South African public in the new work amongst Africans then just starting, and particularly to interest them in the doubly-handicapped. Miss Hall had evolved a method, which she called the Tadoma Method, by which the deaf-blind child was taught by placing his hand on the teacher's face and so getting the vibrations which make up words. This method she had found highly satisfactory for deaf-blind pupils, although, as she pointed out, each pupil differed. The hand was so placed that the thumb felt the movement of the lips and the fingers the vibration on the cheek and throat.

Miss Hall was so impressed by Radcliffe's obvious

intelligence and responsiveness that she decided to try this method of contact. From the beginning Radcliffe enjoyed it and the words Jump and Hop were tried. He quickly responded and learnt the difference, and in a few weeks he understood a dozen commands. A sweet for a reward brought the old smile. A difficulty arose when Miss Hall wanted Radcliffe to say the command, for example, Jump. He continued to obey the command and was distressed that something was wrong. After many mornings with JUMP, NO—SAY JUMP, a breath came out and ZSUMP came. Two sweets brought a wonderful smile, and so we were able to go on. HOP, and he hopped; say HOP, and he breathed HOP—no voice, but perfect formation. Every morning during her stay, Miss Hall persevered with trying to get voice, but nothing came; but the great stage had passed, he had learned to obey a command and to say a word.

He hummed with a closed mm..... and an open nn..... but no voice. He tried MA..... but no voice. Oddly enough he quite soon recognized pitch and showed the pitch with his hand moving up and down. He even produced his hum, high or low as directed, but quite silently. His vocabulary grew, both with the Tadoma Method and with finger spelling, but he made no effort to use either spontaneously. A friend suggested one day of starvation, to force him to ask for food, but somehow we could never do it.

During this time we learnt how he enjoyed rhythm.

He plays tunes on his own with both hands

He tapped back the softest rhythm across a large room. He recognized and clapped a tap with the little finger and imitated it quite correctly. He reproduced long rhythms of song tunes and at a further stage imitated rhythms played on the piano. He was able to show the pitch of the note and to raise and lower his hand as the tune sung to him rose and fell. He learnt to dance and danced lightly and rhythmically and with obvious enjoyment. So a new experience came to him: clapping his hands, rapping a drum, responding to the voice or the piano all added joy both to teacher

and taught. Later the jazz bands on the wireless raised his infectious smile, and now he is part of the band. With all the noise around him he taps away with his wire brush. If only the piano is playing he taps out the rhythm, if left alone he plays tunes of his own with both hands. Which raises the interesting question—What is a tune?

Going to meetings stirred him, and quite soon he recognized that he was expected to show off and made immense efforts to get his voice across. This was particularly obvious at a display of deaf and blind pupils at a bioscope in Johannesburg. We were amused to see him step forward, and thrust his head towards the audience.

VII

EZENZELENI

A FURTHER change in his home again came in 1938, when we brought him to the newly-opened home for blind non-Europeans at Ezenzeleni, in the Transvaal. This was the first centre where adult African and Coloured blind people could receive care and training. The change again delayed Radcliffe's regular teaching, but his interest in the new home and new experiences demonstrated his growing intelligence. He helped pack china and glass, tucking small things into odd corners of the big linen basket very efficiently.

On arrival at Ezenzeleni he quickly learned his way about and around his new home, and again took up his daily routine of bed making, washing cups and saucers and chopping wood. His deftness at washing up a complete dinner service, with the coffee cups that follow, is still an amazement to us. He washes and dries silver, china and glass, and packs them on to the trolley. Quite unaided he pushes the trolley from kitchen to dining-room, opens the cupboard doors and noiselessly puts everything into its right place. All this added to his vocabulary and by this time he could

read on his face over one hundred short sentences. Finger-spelling was still used, but still he could not be persuaded to use either finger-spelling or the tactual method to express himself.

Meanwhile his fingers go everywhere, seeing, seeing, seeing. His favourite position when sitting next to a blind man he likes, is to sit with his fingers on the blind man's head. But his hands stray to the man's pipe, his pocket, his visitors, to the table and stool nearby. At the approach of anyone or any animal, his hands go out, and it was this touching which led to his nickname: One who touches—"Mapupula." He touches the piano, the player and then back to the player's head. He touches the car, the driving wheel, the driver's hands. Mapupula looks and sees.

In February, 1938, we again made efforts to produce voice. This followed on a test at the University Speech Clinic, Johannesburg, where it was proved that the vocal chords were not atrophied, but he was completely deaf. Efforts were made to turn his hissing laughter, so infectious, into a laugh with sound, and one morning it came—a deep Ha Ha. For some time after that, staff members of the Blind Institute reported that he often laughed aloud, but he made no other sound. Ezenzeleni staff and school became a regular part of his day.

He wrote in braille, copying. He added to his whispered vocabulary. He had definite training in voice production. He finger-spelt all the names of his

clothes and the furniture of the house, the gardening implements, and recognized more than 250 words, and nearly as many phrases and short sentences. But still he made no effort to express himself except an occasional demand for sugar. This writing in braille led to another amusing incident. For some time I realized that he only worked under the stimulus of one being near by. If I went away he stopped work ; when I returned I said, "Go on, Radcliffe," and he went on with his writing. After several weeks I decided to give him work, and then go to another room and work there. For several days I had to come in and say, "Go on, Radcliffe." One day I pretended to be very cross when finding him sitting doing nothing ; from that morning he went on and completed the work set. A further development had its more amusing side. He had begun to memorize brailled sentences, and write them from memory. One morning I left the copy on the table, and came back into the room in time to see him furtively fingering the copy, evidently having forgotten something. On my approach he grinned a sheepish grin, and pushed it away. I tapped his hand, but he was very amused at being caught cheating. Who taught him to cheat?

The learning of braille is a strange achievement, the difficulty of it only being understood by those who know braille, but on looking back one marvels at his perseverance in the many technical difficulties ; for example: words may only be divided in syllables when

beginning a new line ; sentences must be finished even if the spacing is not the same as the copy. He has learned and enjoys writing contracted braille, and is much amused that FATHER can be divided up in several ways. Wherein lies the humour of it all? Who knows? Arithmetic is a mystery to him, and although he quite early found a way of counting his canes in the workshop, he is not interested in counting

For the first time he felt a donkey

or simple addition—no smile comes, just dullness. He is able to tell the number of buttons or pennies he has, but evidently does not grasp the significance of number at all. So far we have not used the school readers, but have made up a reader for him which consists of sentences and short stories about things he knows, and his interest in a new story, as soon as he recognizes the characters mentioned and the incidents that happen, gives him great joy. It was particularly interesting on one occasion after he had been to the other workshop at Hamanskraal near Pretoria. There, for the first time, he felt a donkey, the donkey being harnessed to a pole which draws up the water. Radcliffe on that occasion had been given a small cane and told that he must drive the donkey. Holding on to the strap he went round with the donkey, just tapping it if it slowed up too much, I having told him what to do. The following week I had brailled a story telling of that incident. His excitement grew as he read the braille and when he read, "Radcliffe hit the donkey with a cane," he would not leave off laughing.

VIII

RADCLIFFE'S MOTHER

ONE year it was decided to ask his mother Rhoda to come with her little daughter to see Radcliffe. They came up from Durban in July during the winter holidays and first met in the kitchen of our house. Wonderingly Rhoda sat and looked at the well-grown intelligent boy as he stood near by, just touching her. Presently from his pocket he brought out a purse tied up with string—a possession that he would give to no one at the Institution. He took his mother's hands, pressed the purse into them, and closed her hands over it, then smiled that amazing smile of his. We left the kitchen, too deeply moved to stay, and Rhoda and Radcliffe sat, mother and son, conscious of each other's relationship and the love flowing from it. Rhoda stayed for two weeks, and Radcliffe played happily with his sister. His mother taught him to use snuff, and gave him two little snuff boxes. It was an enjoyable holiday, and one that would never be forgotten. During the following year Rhoda died, but she had seen the awakening of her son.

It was a very moving incident in the Chapel of the

He took his Mother's hands

Epiphany at Ezenzeleni that night. All the blind had assembled, Radcliffe among them standing next to his great friend Hebron, a fine Zulu blind man. The hymn had been sung, the prayers said, and the time for notices had come. Father began:

"I have to tell you all some sad news this evening. To-day I had news that Radcliffe Dhladhla's mother has died."

"Inkos," said Hebron aloud, and a sigh went through the building. Radcliffe's mother was dead, and Radcliffe could not be told. Neither could he be

told of the life of courage and sacrifice of his mother, that sacrifice which had meant life to him.

In 1939 he was left with the married staff at Ezenzeleni whilst we went to England, from July to November, thus sharing with England the first shock of the outbreak of war. Periodically we sent Radcliffe postcards brailled or short letters, but it was impossible to know what they meant to him, save that on our return they were found tied up with string among his possessions. Anything he loved he tied up with string. Radcliffe met us in the path and shook hands. With no hesitation he spelt, "Good morning, Father, Good morning, Nomsa." His excitement almost burst out of him and his smile broadened and broadened so that all those watching smiled. This infectious smile is a part of him, and wins for him many real friends.

School was again started and a half-day in the basket shop. He proved quick at basket-making and the long visit of a teacher from Rhodesia hastened his ability, for he loved this new teacher and the teacher loved him. With him he learnt to make round, oval and square baskets, and he made them well. He learnt a simple border for a tray and a simple pattern of chair-caning. Out of the workshop he learnt to knit, crochet, weave, perfected his rug-making with hook and canvas, and whispered the names of his tools and materials.

IX

SPEECH COMES

EVERY day attempts were made to turn the whisper into voice, and one morning it came, CAT. All words beginning with a hard C or K were tried and CAT, CAP became spoken words. This new experience worried him and not even sweets quite comforted him, so he was not over-stimulated. Gradually, however, spoken phrases came, "Father," "Good morning," became words, not whispers. "Father" was a word and "Nomsa" a very clear word.

He reads on our faces! How often that has led to questions being asked. How did you begin?—and how difficult that is to answer. How impossible to answer. How impossible to describe the daily repetition of the facial movements that go to make the sound, the constant repetition of the explosive sounds, the vowels, the association of the word learnt with the object or movement, the building up of ideas, large, small, quick, slow; the exercise to increase the volume and alter the pitch; the early memorising of short phrases to short sentences; the use of short sentences. It is good to look back and get some idea of the

He reads all our faces

journey. How hard it was for him to remember the names only of his clothes, for example, and now he can repeat a long phrase—nothing to help him, no sound, no sight—just movement or vibrations, that is all, just movement.

In November, 1943, Radcliffe, with a companion John, made his first big publicity trip for Ezenzeleni and all that Ezenzeleni means. By this time all the blind workers had left Sophiatown and the work at Ezenzeleni had grown. For this trip, with a van laden with baskets, and Radcliffe and John and ourselves, we set out to visit mission schools in order to demonstrate the need for educating the blind, and to talk

about real prevention measures. The boys proved good showmen—John with his braille-reading, and Radcliffe with his quick response to spoken commands, his braille-reading and his basket-making. Both made many friends. Once again demonstrating helped Radcliffe and he undoubtedly realized that he was showing off. His vocabulary increased during this trip; the whispered voice became harsher and clearer.

Unfortunately on their return both he and John contracted malaria and had to go into a local hospital. At first the Sister was anxious about nursing a deaf-blind patient, but she was persuaded to take him and we urged her to talk to him naturally and put all that he needed within easy reach. It was told us that the doctor, on one of his visits, touched Radcliffe's head, and Radcliffe pressed the doctor's hand firmly, saying, "Hot, Hot!" At the end of his stay the Sister said he was an uncanny patient but a good one, and she often asked afterwards about him. He was very pleased to get home, and his room mates gave him a great welcome. He was soon well and strong again and has not had a recurrence of the fever.

He grew and had occasional fights with blind men. Stealing his tobacco was a cause of many fights. It was during this stage that we had to take away his pocket-knife, a much cherished and much used possession, as he retaliated with his knife, on one occasion cutting a man's trousers very badly. He then took to putting sharp stones or nails under his

pillow, so that evidently he retaliated when teased, and not until a certain blind man left did peace come. The appointment of an attendant protected him, but did not have the effect that one hoped for of inducing him to speak and communicate his desires. This was probably due to a lack of imagination on the part of the attendant, a complete inability to realize the necessity of talking to him—so often the tragedy of the deaf. Very few people will give the deaf what they need—conversation, beyond asking after their health and other such simple statements.

Meanwhile Ezenzeleni grew. The houses in the township of Sophiatown were closed. A small house had been built for the Superintendent and his wife, and, near by, half the future women's hostel. The laying of the Foundation Stone of that building by a prominent citizen of Johannesburg made history. At last the lonely, the unwanted blind African women had a home, and the younger blind women, too old for school, could learn to work, to develop their womanhood. Other buildings went up. On the old stable floor grew a chapel, near by was a hut for the women's crafts-mistress. Another hut was built, and for three years the women knew the selfless love of a woman who recognized all women as sisters. Buildings went up for the men, hostel and workshop, cottages for the staff, and last a long low building at the entrance gate to which those suffering from the fear of blindness may come. Here they find healing and love, just as those

already blinded find healing of mind and soul in their work. In this growing place grew Radcliffe, growing with it, and sharing the life of both the deaf and the blind.

All this is in most beautiful surroundings. The ridge of kopjes overlooks the wide plain of Mulders-drift, a place of historic happenings—a hiding place for Dr. Jameson, and a quiet spot for Rider Haggard to write *King Solomon's Mines*. The farm on which Ezenzeleni has grown is also full of Reef history. Near by gold was found by the Struben brothers, a memorial marking the site. The big trek for gold moved away from this ridge because of the difficulty of working, but little neglected mines tell the story of that early search, and a clause in the trust deed still gives half the gold found, if dug for, to the former owner. Across the plain can be seen the lights of Pretoria, and the glare from the big steel works of Iscor. Over the ridge to the north-east the glow of the city of Johannesburg reminds us of crowded streets—built on gold.

X

RADCLIFFE GROWS UP

RADCLIFFE grew. He danced with the men, and Christmas of 1942 marked a stage in his growing manhood. Presents were being given out by him through Father; then came his own present. Carefully he unwrapped it and put it against the tip of his nose. His laughter at the discovery of what it was infected the whole company, and soon blind men came up to see the cause of the laugh. "What is it?" said Father.

"A pipe," said Radcliffe, and laughter filled the room again. A pipe! It unlocked him, and from that day a lack of tobacco, matches or the loss of his pipe will send Radcliffe all over the institutions. "Tobacco no," "Matches no" or "Pipe no."

An example of the affection he wins is shown by the fact that members of the staff will tell us Radcliffe's pipe is lost, and blind men and staff search for it, for he will not rest without it. He has not lost a pipe this year, and it is undoubtedly due to the feeling against taking Radcliffe's pipe.

Two others joined his class, Frans and Johannes, both very different. Frans arrived one morning, a

He put it against the tip of his nose

bundle of misery and rags, blind, deaf and crippled. A clear case of starvation was the verdict, and Frans was taken in and cleaned and loved. After several weeks he voluntarily took an interest in his surroundings. He learned a little, he saw a little, and he began to explore. His first visit to the classroom drew out Radcliffe's protective sense and he guided Frans about, showing him his braille. This led to complications because Frans refused to do anything but copy Radcliffe, and Radcliffe was uneasy.

Johannes after an operation had a shaft of light in one eye, and we decided to use that, but his early adventures of pilfering, of running away, of refusing to obey anybody would fill a chapter. Quite early Radcliffe had to protect his possessions from him and did not always succeed. Now Frans and Johannes are happy boys, very individual, but taking a part in the life of the place.

During that year another interest came into his life, the opening of Kutlwanong (place of concord), a school for adult deaf-mutes. In a farmhouse an African and his wife lived with eight deaf young men who were being taught finger-spelling by a teacher visiting once a week.

This school was the outcome of much prayer and thought. Frequently magistrates or Native Commissioners rang up the Blind Institute to ask what could be done with an adult deaf boy. Although there are schools for them, often owing to the distances deaf children grow up quite uneducated and then drift into the big towns. When the farm next to the Blind Institute came into the market it seemed a heaven-sent chance, so it was bought and one more educational and social service was started for the handicapped Africans. Again Radcliffe was adopted; just as he is part of the social life of the blind at Ezenzeleni, so he is taken into the deaf life, and Radcliffe helping to push a wheel-barrow, and lifting heavy stones to build up the big terrace was a happy sight. His prowess

with a pick is something to marvel at, but it is well to keep out of his reach.

At the stone-laying of Kutlwanong he stood—the leader of the deaf drilling squad. Behind him the deaf boys stood in the rays of the setting sun. With him they swayed and bent and turned. From exercise to exercise he led them on, finishing up with a perfect clapping exercise with Johannes.

Radcliffe became part of that school with Johannes. Here his contacts increased, more time for talking, more time for learning. All morning in school and all the afternoon in the blind workshop—a full day.

Early in 1946 his life suddenly became very full indeed, for a new principal came to the deaf school from a school for the deaf in the Cape, an old friend, Mrs. Coyne. Mrs. Coyne had seen him as a very small boy in 1938, so her interest in him was very real, and she expressed surprise at his development.

XI

INTO THE FUTURE

AT the Annual Meeting of Ezenzeleni in 1946 Radcliffe sat before the big crowd of Africans and Europeans and read aloud in Braille. If some were moved to tears, is that not all to the good? It may help to release more feeling for the uplifting of the African.

So Radcliffe goes on, and the end of this story is still to be unfolded. One wants to ask so many questions: How does he think? What does he think? Will he be able to express himself in words so that others may be helped by his experience? Will there come a day when the movements and impressions obviously enjoyed by him in the local church service become real to him? Will there come a time when his understanding is so complete that the things of God can be taught to him, so that he may share in the richness of the corporate life of the Christian Church, and receive that sacramental grace without which his life cannot be complete?

He has just entered upon manhood in years. Will the day come when he can say with full African meaning: "I am a man"?

He guided Frans about

THE END

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